

*October 16, 1998*

## **Rosie Provvidenti Honored**

by Linda McCandless

**Geneva, NY** - They say the early bird catches the worm, but what they don't tell you is that it's the hard-working vegetable virologist who unearths the disease. Dr. Rosario ('Rosie') Provvidenti, Cornell University professor of plant pathology, whom many consider the world's foremost authority on vegetable diseases, continues to arrive at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva at 7 a.m. and works long hours. Despite the fact that he retired seven years ago, he directs a very active research program, is a requested lecturer at meetings all over the world, and is as comfortable with conventional breeding as he is with genetic engineering.



On Tuesday, October 20, Dr. Provvidenti is being recognized at a symposium and a dinner in his honor that will be hosted by seed companies and the Geneva Station.

"Dr. Provvidenti's vast knowledge in the identification of viruses, and his work in the genetics of resistance is recognized by scientists and seed companies in the United States and around the world," said Station director, Jim Hunter. "Many of his discoveries have been used to improve vegetable crops." His work helped to establish good working relationships between seed companies and the Station long before it was popular to talk about partnerships between the university and the private sector.

"Dr. Provvidenti put the Experiment Station on the map as a center of excellence for identifying genes for resistance to viruses in vegetable crops. Without him, the Station-and even the College of Agriculture at Cornell-would not have the renowned program it does dealing with virus diseases of vegetables," said Hunter.

The objectives of Dr. Provvidenti's research program are the identification of

viruses occurring in vegetable crops and their biological control. A major emphasis has been directed toward the search for natural sources of resistance utilizing domestic and foreign introduction of cultivated and wild species of beans, crucifers, cucurbits, lettuce, peas, peppers, spinach, tomatoes, and other crops. He has been instrumental in controlling diseases of New York State vegetables, and his work has been applied to varieties of these vegetables from all over the world.

"Dr. Provvidenti has had a distinguished career, and his contributions to the vegetable industry of New York and the United States have been tremendous," said Herb Aldwinckle, professor of plant pathology at Geneva, one of the organizers of the symposium.

"Rosie has found and characterized more sources of disease resistance than anybody. He has studied how they are inherited, and helped breeders incorporate the resistance into varieties. His work has been indispensable to me," said vegetable breeder Richard Robinson, professor of horticultural sciences at Geneva.

The utilization of resistance genes in the development of new cultivars, and close cooperation with vegetable breeders of public and private institutions continue to be the ultimate goal of his entire research program.

"Vegetable pathology is a very frustrating kind of research," said Mike Szkolnik, retired professor of plant pathology, who is a contemporary of Dr. Provvidenti. "There are very delicate lines between vegetable varieties and the strains of viruses that affect them. Once you think you have made a tremendous contribution, you come to the humiliating realization that somewhere in the world, the same virus decimates another strain of the same plant. Rosie has traveled all over the world searching for plant genetic material, studying the viral causes of disease, and trying to improve or at least reduce the loss in productivity of important vegetable crops."

Dr. Provvidenti received his doctorate in microbiology from the University of Palermo in Italy, in 1947. He came to work at the Geneva Experiment Station as a research associate in the department of plant pathology in 1954. He has the unique distinction of being promoted from a non-professorial position to a professorship in 1984, and was named a Liberty Hyde Bailey Professor upon his retirement in 1991. In 1986, he was named a Fellow by the National American Phytopathological Society.

The symposium, which starts at 2 p.m. at the Ramada Inn on the Lakefront in Geneva, is being chaired by Dennis Gonsalves, also a Liberty Hyde Bailey Professor. Speakers will include Dr. Henry Munger (Dept. of Fruit and Vegetable Sciences-Ithaca), Dr. Ted Superak from Harris Moran Seed Company, Dr. Phyllis Himmel from Seminis Vegetable Seeds, Professor Margaret M. Kyle-Jahn (Dept of Plant Breeding-Ithaca), Dr. Seitaro Sakamoto from American Takii, Inc., Dr. Clark Nicklow, from Nicklow Seeds, Donald Wertman, from Seedway, and Professor

Richard Robinson (Dept. Hort Sciences-Geneva). Following the reception and dinner, speakers will include professors Helene Dillard, Herb Aldwinckle, Dennis Gonsalves, Jim Hunter (all from Dept. of Plant Pathology-Geneva), Steven Slack (Dept. Plant Science-Ithaca), and Rosario Provvidenti, himself.

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**Note to Editors:** A 300 ppi version can be downloaded by clicking on the photo above. If you would like a hard copy of the photo, contact Rob Way at 315-787-2357, or email [rfw2@cornell.edu](mailto:rfw2@cornell.edu)

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